

— 2021 —

# Lenten Devotional



**LAMENTING IN GOD'S EMBRACE**

FOUNDRY  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
WASHINGTON, DC

Foundry's 27th annual Lenten Devotional explores the spiritual practice of lamentation and contributors' experiences with it. You are invited into *Lamenting in God's Embrace* with daily reflections, Sunday companion practices, and programs listed on page 48.

## A Lament on Lamenting

*For some*

*Relief, release, turning over  
to God*

*Feelings let out, expressed*

*Finally, fully, experienced*

*Opening for healing*

*For others*

*Anxiety, fear too frequent  
companions*

*Deeper entry into lamenting*

*More sorrowing equals more  
fear*

*Overwhelmed and not  
comforted?*

*Which experience will I have?*

*Trusting God and trying  
to trust God*

*Help!*

*God has gotten me  
through before*

*Remembering*

*Trying it out, gingerly  
God's guidance through  
the process*

*Feeling some release,  
some healing*

*May it be so for all*

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**Patricia Wood**

# The Journey Through

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Our physical bodies alert us when there is danger--touch something hot and pain causes us to protect ourselves. Ignoring chronic physical pain allows the underlying cause to worsen. Emotional pain is less straightforward; similar dynamics are at play. Loneliness, betrayal, fear, disappointment, insecurity, abuse, guilt, loss, grief...these things have to be named and addressed or their pain will continue unabated.

Denial or suppression of our emotional pain can lead to all sorts of nasty, destructive behaviors. And it is the same in the larger society. For any healing or freedom to happen, we have to allow ourselves to feel the pain; we have to acknowledge the pain, be in it, go through it. This is difficult and can feel overwhelming. We generally don't want to do it and try to get out of it in all sorts of ways. We "hope for the best," convince ourselves that time alone will magically heal wounds or injustice, or try to mask or erase the pain through distractions, addictions, or rationalizations. None of these things release us from the reality.

The beginning of healing and liberation is to tell the truth, to name the source of our pain, to acknowledge that there is hurt, and to begin to address it with love and compassion. Lament helps us do just that. Through prayer, ritual, or even rage, we bring our cries to God, trusting that God can take it, will be with us in our pain, anger, or despair, and will help us move through it. It may seem counterintuitive.

But Jesus reveals that it is journeying through the trials, pain, and injustice of life—not shortcuts or workarounds—that resurrection and new life is found. Lament is our spiritual practice of following Jesus: trusting God's love to hold us, guide us, and bring us into...Easter!

## Prayer:

*Loving God, may the ashes of our grieving become the soil of our growing. Amen.*

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**Rev. Ginger E. Gaines-Cirelli**  
Senior Pastor / Foundry UMC

# Leaning Into Lament

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*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ...But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

Psalm 13: 1-2, 5-6 NRSV

The poetic, prayerful pattern of almost all psalms of lament reminds us that expressing the reality of our suffering, longing, loss, and anger is part of, but not the end of, our story. Lament begins with invocation, normally a plea for help with the named suffering. It makes a request for God's intervention and remembers with confidence God's faithfulness. Psalmists again and again end lament in praise, or hope for transformation, showing us that God is equally capable of receiving our lament and responding to it.

As we lament, we remember that God is with us in it. As we express our praise, we integrate our experience of lament into the larger narrative of the divine story: God neither leaves nor forsakes us while also working toward healing and justice in the world.

Lament may be discouraging or uncomfortable whenever it is seen as too dangerous, too painful, or a sign of weakness. God's love, however, welcomes it. Imagine that! In a world where lament is unwelcome, God grants freedom to express it and promises that lament—or the work of hiding it—doesn't have to define us. We hurt. We experience anger. We bear the wounds of resentment and rage. We have broken relationships in desperate need of healing.

The invitation for us is to become intimate with lament—to name it before God and to own it as a part of our lives. And to trust, that as we do so, and invite God into the mess of all, then the work of healing can truly begin.

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**Rev. William E. Green**

*Associate Pastor*

*Director of Discipleship / Foundry UMC*

# Lament of Light

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One tiny thread  
One insignificant sliver  
One singular shred  
How do we show up and believe?  
When bodies continue to be broken every single moment  
When will there be reprieve?  
What happens when we've lost hope?  
When it falls out of arm's reach  
When it's one thing after another, and it couldn't have been written any better  
When the rain keeps coming down and everything keeps getting wetter  
What happens then?  
When our faith seems so thin  
What do you say when I feel unworthy or when I can't speak at all?  
How can I just stand here and watch everything fall?  
One tiny thread  
One insignificant sliver  
One singular shred  
If we just hold on, if we keep showing up, if we pay attention  
To that ghost of faith in the corner  
Nudging us to continue the work of holy dissention  
We might remember that at one point no one believed  
At one point the doors were dark and the tomb was full  
And faith lurked only as a ghost unrecognizable through grief  
It seemed there would be no relief  
One tiny thread  
One insignificant sliver  
One singular shred  
A glimpse into the soul of the light Giver

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**Rev. K.C. Van Atta-Casebier**

*Director of Family Ministries / Foundry UMC*

# Caring Embrace

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*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.*

1 Peter 5:7-9 NRSV

There are weeks when I look back on what I had planned for the week and by Friday, it looks totally different. Have you had weeks like that? As we enter into the season of Lent, we may have experiences that don't look anything like we planned. They may conjure up for us deeper and more painful responses than we anticipated. Lent calls us to a deeper connection with God. Sometimes that is not easy.

The scripture in First Peter gives us direction on what to do with those deeper and sometimes more painful responses during this Lenten season. We can cast our cares to God. We are called to be mindful when the Lenten season has uncovered painful emotions, anxiety, or other feelings we are navigating. Let us stay alert about our responses, our emotions. Journaling, prayer, and therapy help me. Similar spiritual practices offered at Foundry and in this devotional may help you.

Lastly, know that God surrounds us with those who offer care, friendship and love as we unpack our emotions during this season. Let us give ourselves the care that we need in the midst of what may be a time of deep emotion. Let us be mindful when we are in need of being surrounded by those who offer us care: a friend, our pastor, our therapist, and support groups.

Remember, you are not alone on the journey. We travel this Lenten journey together.

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**Rev. Dr. Kelly L. Grimes**

*Director of Hospitality and  
Congregational Care / Foundry UMC*

# Spiritual Autobiography

## Companion Spiritual Discipline for *The Address: Calling God into Lament*

A spiritual autobiography is a story about your personal history with God. It offers us the chance to examine our journey of faith. By remembering our past experiences of God, we're better able to seek God's embrace and name what we need for the next leg of our journey.

Throughout this next week, you are invited to write a spiritual autobiography, paying particular attention to moments of heartache, loss, and lament. Consider how, in those moments, God showed up--perhaps through a friendship, or an inner voice during meditation or prayer, or through someone who prayed for you when you could not pray for yourself.

You may want to use the format below. As you write, please use this week's devotionals, and their authors' experiences with calling God into lament, to prompt and encourage your thinking.

- Set aside 45-60 minutes and find a quiet space to write. Invite God to be with you.
- Begin by thinking about the places you first heard about God. Where were you? Who was involved? Was it a positive or negative experience?
- When and where have you felt especially close to God? What was happening in your life? Who else was involved?
- When have you felt distant from God? What was happening in your life? Who else was involved?
- When and where have you experienced deep trust in or awareness of God's presence? What did that feel like?
- When and where have you experienced doubt in God's presence or resentment toward God? What did that feel like?
- Where are you right now? What doubts do you have? What do you need to take your next steps on the journey?
- Conclude with prayer. Thank God for being with you thus far. Invite God to be with you as you continue through Lent.

**Rev. William E. Green**

*Associate Pastor and  
Director of Discipleship / Foundry UMC*

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# How Long

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Oh God, I am utterly alone  
I have not laughed in an age.  
When will you kill this viral curse?  
We are done-in already.

Please, I beg you to restore community  
And yes, obliterate corona... and killer bees.  
Hold us tenderly until then  
And I will sing your praises.

I am grateful for your daily care.  
Your presence is dependable when I cry.  
I know you are near when I fall asleep  
And your light proclaims a new day.

Your love endures.  
My love grows.

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**Jeanette Barker**



TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23

# Worth the Call

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Until recently, calling to God in lament was something I could not bring myself to do. I might have placed the call but would hang up before connecting. I could never get past the inner dialog that judged my feelings as petty, unworthy of God's attention. This was especially true this past year when the entire world was under siege. How could I complain when COVID had not found me or my family. I had all I needed and more. My skin color grants privilege. Wildfires would not torch my existence. I could, at will, tune out the soul-numbing din of 24/7 information. I could tune into Nature whenever I wished just by stepping outside into my garden.

Yet, the knot of pain over the wellbeing of a beloved was present and real.

Inner voices of past experience called out. "Suck it up," they'd say, "You have nothing to complain about." Or they'd redirect my thoughts away from my lament to my many blessings. Or, perhaps they'd suggest an article or YouTube video that could fix my issue. In my mind, it seemed best to dismiss or deny my little sorrow or explain it away and keep plugging away.

Perhaps I needed to be reminded that no lament of us beloved children is too large or too small to take to God. I need not minimize or rationalize the pain I feel. I need not follow a particular script either. My call to God is more a reverential whisper or unspoken thought than a passionate cry. Practicing lamentation taught me that however I place that call, God will pick up.

**Prayer:**

*The knot in my heart  
seeks God's embrace. "It hurts, Lord."  
God: "Tell me. I'm here."*

*And then, my precious Lord will take my hand. Amen.*

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**Joanne Steller**

# Soul Scream

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What's going on?  
How long will it last?  
How bad will it get?  
What do we do?

Well, how about  
we all let out  
one great big  
sonic shattering

## SOUL SCREAM

just let go caution,  
belt it out beam it  
straight at God?  
It's an excellent and  
time appropriate prayer.  
And prayer it is,  
the not well known  
and rarely referenced

## PRAYER OF LAMENTATION

One way or many,  
we all need to do  
some sort of such a

## SOUL SCREAM

Everyone is carrying  
a ton of super heavy stuff  
on their heads  
and in their hearts.  
We're bending to break.

There's the constant  
reevaluation upon reevaluation  
of what's going on  
and how to go on,  
while not having any way to go on.  
beyond the doors of confinement,  
be they physical and/or  
psychological.

When not doing that,  
it's churning over and over  
the freight for a future  
on the far side of ambiguity.

Yep, time for some  
good old fashioned

Prayer of Lamentation.

In the vernacular,  
it is telling God off  
and that in spades,  
listing the particulars  
of our pain,  
no punches pulled.  
God can handle it.  
God is Abba, father.  
It's like a wonderful father,  
holding a toddler in tantrum,  
allowing for its  
full force and fury  
until it's all out  
and the child rest secure  
in the accepting,  
loving embrace of its Abba.

# Accepting God's Will

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*He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.*

Psalm 126:6 NIV

Twenty-seven years ago, when my youngest child became critically ill, I had no clue about Systemic Lupus. Initially neither did the doctors. This illness seemed to have come out of the blue.

As his illness progressed, I prayed for miracles. I should say, I began telling God what I wanted. I wanted physical healing. I wanted my child back on his feet doing what he had always done, singing, dancing, teaching and just being the healthy happy young person he had been.

One morning as I was washing dishes and praying, "God, please help the doctors find what is wrong and heal my child," I heard a reply "this is GOD'S child." I pushed, "He is your child God. Heal him. He is so young; he has a lot to offer the world. Heal him." Never did I pray, "Your will be done," accepting that whatever the outcome, God would be with us.

I heard my child pray from his hospital bed, "Thank You Daddy God for being with me and loving me even here." Yet, I could not accept that. I wanted physical healing and so I missed some of the blessings.

Twenty-seven years later, I continue to see the blessings my son left during his walk through this life. Most recently, I received a request from one of his students asking permission to use his photograph and other information about him to teach a class on diversity and inclusion. During this time of unrest, especially, I see what a transformative impact my son had on the lives he touched.

## **Prayer:**

*Dear God, teach me how to pray. Remind me always that you are in the mix, not my will but "Thy will be done."*

# God, It's Me, Chuck

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I'm mad at you. I want to shake my fist at you.

Why do I feel like that rage? You assured me you care. You know me by name. Yet, in my eighty-plus years, so many disturbing things have happened to me and around me. I feel my anger finally boiling over. Do you mean: feel like raging? Or, feel that rage?

David sang out in Psalm 143:1, "Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief."

As a child, I was told the war was over. Nevertheless, other wars followed. Where is your promised peace?

How could you allow millions to perish in death camps during the Holocaust?

Why do you let children slowly starve to death due to famine and disease?

**10** — What say you to racism and nationalism, used as justification to torture and kill?

So many people are sick and dying during the pandemic. Why?

But my grief and anger are personal.

Why can't I see my mother's face again? Why can't I talk to my father and hear his voice?

Why do I have a bone marrow disease?

But . . .

Shouting in anger, I realized you already know my rage and pent-up feelings. I take comfort in my lifelong walk with your Son. Even when I ignored him, he remained at my side.

Even in grief, I'm thankful for the countless memories gathered in my lifetime. I'm alive and enjoy life despite the disease. I've had a loving partner for fifty-three years.

I'm angry. I'm hurting. Even so, you give me assurance. I'm not asking for wealth and fame. I only need your strength, promised by the gift of your son, Jesus. For in 1 John 2:1 it is written, "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

# Lamenting Together

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*O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.*  
Psalm 88:1 ESV

Lamentations are a cry to the Lord, a call in the wilderness to fill the hard silence. What does it mean to lament—crying, sobbing, pushing your pain into the world - in a time where calling out, being near each other, brings danger?

I've always found comfort in connection, of sharing my heart face-to-face alongside a consoling hug. But then, in March 2020, that had to stop. That time feels like a lifetime ago, but my strongest memory is a sense of suspension. Not only did my commute stop, it felt like connecting had to stop. Nothing felt safe, so the safest thing was to retreat inward—inside my home and inside myself.

I didn't feel connected then, to God or anyone else. And you can't live like that—none of us can. Holding your pain inside your own heart, not sharing it in prayer or with others, doesn't work and doesn't heal. Laments are meant to be said aloud, to be named and shared.

It wasn't until I started sharing with others, telling the truth about my life and hearing theirs, that I started to find comfort. Zoom and driveway hangouts were a salve, weird but welcome. Somehow, sitting awkwardly on a converted lawn with fellow masked friends was a source of healing because we were awkward together.

We want to lament when we feel alone, abandoned by others and by God. I've learned that it's the very act of lamenting, of saying "I am in pain, this hurts and has to change," that connects us to others and to God. Naming a lament means we are no longer alone.

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**Beth Scott**

# The Examen

Companion Spiritual Discipline for:  
***The Complaint: Naming One's Lament Before God***

The practice of the daily Examen has its roots in Jesuit spirituality, whose founder—St. Ignatius of Loyola—sought to help people live lives which were guided first by God's will. By examining the events of the day behind us, paying particular attention to the places and ways we were aware of God's presence, we become better able to listen for and recognize God's presence in the future. In addition to reading this week's devotions, which will explore the way that contributors became aware of God's presence when naming their lament, we encourage you to practice the Examen using the pattern below, paying particular attention to the ways God was present in moments of grief, sorrow, fear, pain, or anger.

- Find a quiet location and set aside 10-15 minutes to pray. Become aware of God's presence with you as you pray.
- Review the day behind you with gratitude.
- Pay attention to your emotions. Where did you experience joy? Grief? Anger? Where was God present in the midst of those emotions?
- Choose one moment or experience of the day and pray from it, allowing whatever you feel guide your choice of prayer—intercession, thanksgiving, confession.
- Look toward tomorrow. Invite God to be with you and to make God's presence known to you throughout the day.

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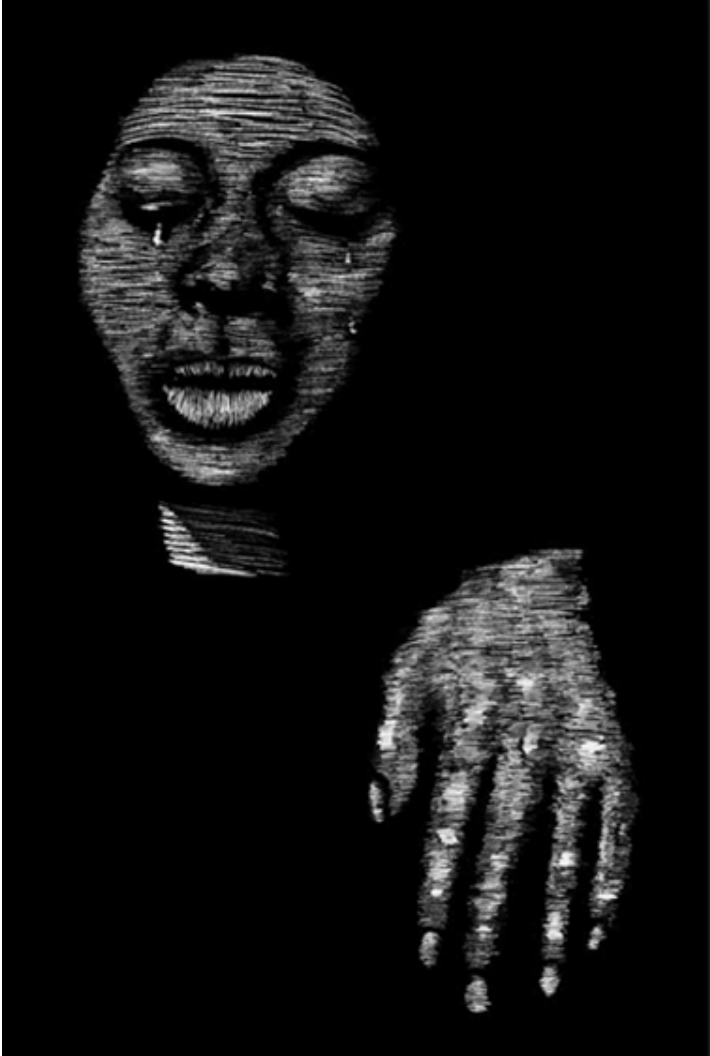
**Rev. William E. Green**

*Associate Pastor and  
Director of Discipleship / Foundry UMC*

MONDAY, MARCH 1

# How Long, O Lord?

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Jeff Dietterle

# A Wail for Justice

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We are on the street from dawn to dusk for the right to breathe. My life matters. Black lives matter. We are desperate for Pilate's empire to fall so we might breathe.

Mother God, how long, shall my people exist under the burden and violence of white supremacy? How long shall I show my wounds, turning out my hands, lending a view of my side where deep cuts lay? How long shall I be asked to prove that I am bleeding and that white supremacy wields the weapon? How long must I reconfigure? How long will I have my energy disrupted by racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and colonialism?

How long shall I bend to be a bridge, hold my tongue, assuage guilt, teach even though I am exhausted, explain, forebear, ignore, placate, maneuver, withstand curiosity, be strong, labor to save the humanity of those who cannot see mine, give attention when I wish to be in joy elsewhere, or forgive turning my cheek as if I were meat on a spit. I am your child. You have claimed me. I am here, like Lucille Clifton, between "starshine and clay." I hear you call me your beloved. Your blessings abound. And, yet. Each day "something has tried to kill me and has failed." I have survived. We have survived.

We have labored and struggled and lived – made beauty and thrived, become the envy of the world – amidst an onslaught of injustice. I am tired, Lord. We are tired, Lord. My hope is calcifying. I am losing hope in the divine capacity of humanity. I am hardening. I am discouraged. I am enraged. I feel despair that nothing will change. The empire is too strong. The longing for superiority too mighty and the devotion to the privileges of life too reassuring.



I seek you. I seek your strength. I seek your abiding presence. I seek your justice. I seek your assurance. I seek your everlasting commitment to your people. I seek your unfathomable waters of justice. I want to swim in the rolling deep tide of justice, renewed and called back to you by the sting of salt, grace, and power. We are your people. You have claimed us. I know this. I believe it. May our hearts beat together as the tide of justice comes.

May we have justice. May we have honor. May we have peace. May we have truth. May we ground ourselves in the radical roots of the tree of life. May we look to the hills from whence our help comes and see you there, on your way, with your promise of great joy in the morning. May we who struggle have rest. May your fire sign show the path, throwing light and strength for the way forward. May we be engulfed by the balm of your cooling waters. May we have our healed warm beating hearts.

In the name of Mother Father God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ, may the lamentations of my heart fly on the wings of the prayers of my foremothers, who stood and bore empire and who built ways to shelter our hearts and fortify our spirits. I call their names:

**Sheba, and Hagar, Mary and Walatta,  
Miriam, and Tamar, Prathia and Katie, Anthea,  
Martha and Vashti, and Ella, and Septima,  
Mary Helen and Anna, and Pauli, and Delores,  
Sojourner, and Nannie, and Harriet, and Rosa, and  
Toni, and Lucille, and Dorothy, and Ida, Pepper and  
Marsha and Angela who disembarked the sole woman  
among 20, Frances and Phillis, Tituba and Margaret,  
Alberta, and Coretta, and Fannie Lou, Shirley and  
Barbara, and Octavia, and Sandra, and Breonna.**

**Amen.**

# Macular Degeneration

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## No. 1

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I am inclined toward somber shades,  
motley backdrops, and a blizzard  
of distortions. Milton's blindness  
rushes at me from the sheen of  
clean slates. Retinal leaks sketch  
lesions spindly enough for a  
spider to spin her silk. I have guarded  
the known from the unknown,  
adapted to one headlight without  
ditching, the body handy with a  
crutch. Meantime, I have memorized  
flowers and friends, vestibuled  
in my brain poetry and art. Experience  
at pouring tea in a cup will  
covertly befriend my hand. Grandchildren  
faces igniting the wick of my  
joy I will superimpose on yet-to-be  
years. There are infinite bridges  
to light. It is said that other senses  
smarten up when one shuts down.  
I am in training for diminishment but  
there is no celebration in the  
works for arrival at home plate.

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**Sunny Branner**

From her book,  
*Windsong A Life in Poetry*

# What I've Learned

What I've learned since we started all of this  
Is that you don't have to have something  
In order to mourn it.  
Loss doesn't require possession.

My lament is not for what I had,  
It's for what I have not had.  
My heart cries out for what I may not have  
While I'm socially distanced and safe at home.

I didn't feel this way at first –  
There were so many other things to feel.  
Confusion, rage, fear, concern, sorrow, pity, anger, horror.  
But feelings, like minds, change and grow.

I still feel all these feelings, but I feel them in different ratios,  
They have different ingredients, different tastes.  
Sweet, sour, hard, soft.  
Not a dish we wanted but one we all have to eat.

I want to be a mother, to have a family, a partner and full home.  
I don't know if these wishes will come true.  
I don't know if they would anyway.  
But at least before there was a chance.

For now (at least) there's not a chance –  
Of walking into a magical first date  
And tumbling off into the future together.  
Not while I'm socially distanced and safe at home.

It doesn't feel like there's a chance now.  
No chance of exploring single parenthood,  
Learning more about ovarian reserves and IVF.  
Not while I'm socially distanced and safe at home.

I am very aware and am actually ashamed  
Of how privileged I am.  
That while people lose their jobs, their homes, their very lives,  
I'm grieving what I never had.

What I've learned is that you can lament not just what you've lost  
That it's not just losing something from your hands.  
It's losing the hope  
Of ever grasping something in your arms.

# The Spinning Disk

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*In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion.*  
Psalm 71:1 KJV

I'm enduring a love-hate relationship with my computer. It's my primary source to the outside world, my link with friends, cherished activities, and a path from isolation.

My anxiety begins when I turn on my computer. Will I successfully sign on? Or be blocked by an invalid password, spinning disk, or incomplete entry? I tell myself "stay calm." When I'm successfully signed on, I breathe a sigh of relief.

When I'm not, my anxiety heightens. Why am I blocked? Who can help me? The Apple Help Desk can be a harrowing experience. Verification can bring me to tears. Some reps lack expertise while others are difficult to follow. Hours on the phone don't quell my anxiety.

When an IT expert arrived at my home, I had high hopes. We interacted together, me asking questions, her fingers flying over the keyboard opening portals, exploring problems. When she left, my computer was up and running. I responded to emails and caught up.

Next morning I tried accessing my email. My password popped up invalid. I was back at square one and frustrated. I initiate another call for help and, hopefully, resolution.

My life depends on it.

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**Diane Seeger**

# Fasting

Companion Spiritual Discipline for:  
***The Request: Asking for God's Intervention in Lament***

Fasting may be one of the oldest—and yet most misunderstood—of all the spiritual disciplines. The Bible records stories of fasts observed by prophets, leaders, and even Jesus, all of which were used to grow in an individual's awareness of God's presence, to become aware of what God is calling them to do, or to grow in our awareness of the places and ways in which we need to grow in our relationship with God.

Fasting exposes the things that fill our lives and may be distracting us from an awareness of God. It invites us to lay these distractions aside. Through self-denial we begin to recognize what regularly fills our lives, and to give up that which does not help us live in love with God or one another.

Fasting often includes giving up food, but not water, for a particular period of time over a set period of days or weeks. Some of us are unable to do this.

This week, we invite you to identify something which regularly takes up your time or attention—whether it is food, social media, or a personal habit—and use that time instead to pray, journal, or study Scripture. As our devotional writers take us through their own journey of making requests for God in the face of lament, we invite you to use that time, too, to reflect on where you might want or need to invite God's presence into your own places of pain, grief, and sorrow.

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**Rev. William E. Green**

*Associate Pastor and  
Director of Discipleship / Foundry UMC*

# Not Alone

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Oh God, I am weighed down with loneliness.  
And I miss Gordon in this time of stress.  
Please enliven my spirit from distress.

God, please ease those hearts broken by  
400 years of slave memory – it's too heavy.  
Spread righteousness around the world.

Forgive me Lord for not writing a To Do List,  
Forgetting to complete one thing or another.  
Prompt me to speak and act in love.

Purify my heart when I eat to feel better.  
Lift my arrogance and my hunger.

When I'm annoyed by the corner boom box,  
Help me speak to the guy and make peace.

I will hand you that poor me attitude whenever  
I feel like I'm suffering alone.

Keep us all in your warm embrace.

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**Jeanette Barker**

# Feed My Lambs

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*You're blessed when you feel you have lost what is most dear to you.  
Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.*  
Mark 5:4 MSG

**Ella:** I miss my kids. I want to teach them, learn with them, talk with them, hug them.

I feel empty, useless.

They're on Zoom-school all day, so they don't need more of that from me. What can I do, God? Please give me something to do, to help others.

**God:** *Feed my lambs.*

**Ella:** What? I don't cook, and anyway, I have a very small kitchen. How do I do this?

Did you mean this literally, feed them with food? Or give them what they need?

**God:** *Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with me.*

**Ella:** Those are very nice words, but that isn't working for me right now. I'm bored, lonely, and anxious at home. I'm afraid to go out, though.

**God:** *Have you connected with anybody that is providing food for the needy?*

**Ella:** Well, no, I thought I was supposed to read to my school kids.

**God:** *You need to broaden your service. I have given you different skills.*

**Ella:** All right, but they still need help academically...

**God:** *You can figure out what to do. I am with you, always. I will strengthen you.*

## Postscript:

I have reconnected with Foundry's Sandwich 1,000. I am working with Mutual Aid's food bank at Luther Place and I assist Ms. Olga on 11th street in distributing food from various agencies. An added bonus is that I get to see some of my school kids at Luther Place and on 11th street, as they stand in line for food.

Shortly after this lament with God, a Kindergarten teacher at Thomson Elementary School contacted me regarding reading stories to his class twice a week on Zoom.

# Fortress of Solitude

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*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*  
Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV

Sheltering-in-place became my modus operandi in mid-March 2020. Before that time, during a typical week I crossed paths with roughly 50 to 100 people. I had meaningful conversations with some of them.

Feeling good about accomplishing something while interacting with others was a source of delight for me. I liked my weekly routine and always had something to think about that occurred outside of my head—in the Smithsonian American Art Museum, in businesses, restaurants, in the homes of my friends, on the Metro.

As the long pandemic weeks passed, I went through periods of withdrawal accompanied by anxiety, loneliness and sadness. In July, however, I found I was adjusting to the restricted contact with outsiders. Solitude became comfortable. I saw fewer than a handful of people in a week. As the months passed, I found myself accepting things as they were. I became at ease with minimal contact. Solitude eventually felt right.

As of this writing, I am afraid. I feel like a frightened turtle! I do not want to resume my pre-pandemic life. It might be easier to continue sheltering in place. Safety first, right?

A year ago, I eagerly socialized with outsiders. Today, I fear being among the crowd.

When the time is right, God, please give me courage to pick up and carry on. Allow me to be spurred from the virtual to the real by friends and colleagues. Amen.

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Stephen Roberts



# O God, Help Me

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*Those who mourn are fortunate!  
for they shall be comforted.*  
Matthew 5:4 TLB

A month before Joanne and I were married, I lost my job. The architectural firm where I worked had speculated their fees on what became a defunct redevelopment project. This cloud had a silver lining. Before our wedding day, I had landed a new position that a year later helped me get into graduate school. There, I found in a business school course a calling to real estate development. One of the attractions was my belief that I would be less susceptible to losing employment because I would be representing ownership interests. As it turned out, this was not the case. Job losses resulted with numerous economic downturns over my 45-year career. Each time, especially as I neared retirement, I felt that I was at the end of my rope. I lamented, “O God, help me.”

Living in a pandemic, I find that I am making the same plea to God, especially when darkness engulfs me. I feel despair about how to address daunting health and economic challenges as well as systemic injustices and threats to our democracy.

Yet, I know from humbling past experience that God will help me in unexpected ways. He is my supportive partner, encouraging me to have patience, focus and persistence to find my way. He will draw me closer, reminding me each time He is the Master Builder, I the Worker. I do not need to be overwhelmed by loss or despair, since I am ever in the comfort of God's embrace.

## **Prayer:**

*Yes, [the Lord] alone is my rock, my rescuer, defense and fortress –  
why then should I be tense with fear when troubles come?  
(Psalm 62: 6 TLB) Amen.*

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**Joe Steller**

# Adrift in a Holding Pattern

I didn't truly understand loneliness until I went to live in a small village overseas and felt isolation at full force. I wondered: how could this be fair? Why was I allowed to feel so disconnected when so many people on social media seemed to be having the time of their lives?

Moving to DC had a similar effect. I struggled to find work doing what I had dreamt of—nonviolent conflict management—right when a new president came into power who seemed actively against that. I felt like I was seeing all my graduate school classmates surpass me, doing work that was helping make the world a better place. And here I was, underemployed, adrift and unsure.

Even when I did find a new job that I thought would fit, I soon realized I still wasn't making the impact I wanted. I started looking for a new direction... and then the pandemic hit. I found myself once more being ghosted by recruiters and tripped up by red tape. As I struggle to figure out my career while burnout takes a hold, I lament once more.

"Why would a fair God keep dangling these job opportunities over my head only to take them away so often at the last minute?"

But then, I look back on all those times I felt myself in the depths of despair, and I see how God was steering me. Those were times when rejections were shortly followed by opportunities. Those moments of sadness made me able to truly feel joy, and those moments of doubt helped me to truly feel faith.

After thinking about all the job prospects that I lost, I'm starting to realize, "perhaps that's God telling me that wasn't where I am supposed to go."

Beth Gawne

SATURDAY, MARCH 13

# Through it All

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*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.*  
Isaiah 40:1 KJV

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*  
Matthew 5:4 ESV

2020 had barely begun when you took Alex, who often sat in the choir loft to my right. Then you looked to my left and grabbed John less than two months later. Oh, but you were just getting started. Then you took one aunt. Then another. Oh Lord, as if that weren't enough, then you took my sister, Marsha. Then Audrey's mother. And as 2020 turns to 2021, my friend and neighbor, Mel, hangs by a thread in the ICU. His wife and son really need him—and so do I. How much longer, Lord? How long?

But is my sorrow any greater than your other faithful but woefully imperfect servants? No. There are so, so many others that have suffered far, far more. So many injustices. So many inequities. So much hurt. I feel so small and insignificant.

My lament is a personal one, yet likely similar to those within the larger Foundry Family and beyond. Please offer a balm to me, a balm to us. Help me to understand. If I can't understand, at least help me to gradually find peace. As Andraé Crouch wrote and sang so well: "Lord I know you'll help get me through these valleys and storms, these tears and sorrows...that you will help me (and us) get through it all."

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**Michael Lawson**

# Centering Prayer

Companion Spiritual Discipline for:

***The Motivation: Upholding God's Will, Hearing God's Word***

Centering prayer is a form of Christian meditation that places a strong emphasis on being aware of God's presence in our lives. It helps us learn to "be" with God—fully present, without the need for words or explanation, and trusting that we are held in God's love. By creating intentional space to be with God, we learn what being in God's presence feels like.

As we enter a week in which our devotionals will focus on being vulnerable to God, we invite you to use centering prayer to help you practice being in "God's embrace" in places of longing, hurt, and heartache. We've included some basic steps below to help you explore and experience Centering Prayer.

- Set aside 10-15 minutes for prayer, and find a quiet, comfortable space for reflection.
- Choose a word that holds sacred meaning for you. It may be "love," "joy," "peace," "hope," "Spirit," or whatever speaks most to where you find yourself today.
- Sit comfortably and relax. Quiet your thoughts and prayerfully invite God to join you. The purpose of Centering Prayer is not to ask God for anything, but to sit silently in God's presence.
- Let your sacred word be present in your minds as a symbol of your intention in prayer. Focus on your word, but try to keep it unspoken.
- When you find your thoughts beginning to wander, return to your sacred word as an anchor in the space that you have set aside for God.
- Remain in silence and ideally spend 10-15 minutes in silent prayer.
- Spend a few minutes after praying to write down words, phrases, or thoughts that capture your prayerful experience.

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**Rev. William E. Green**

*Associate Pastor and*

*Director of Discipleship / Foundry UMC*

# Faith Enough

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When Jan and I sit down to a meal, it is our custom that I offer a prayer. Over the past year, my prayers have tended to begin with words of gratitude for love, food, shelter, opportunities, challenges. I follow with a lengthy petition for the people left out, including the homeless, jobless, hungry, sick, dying, and afraid, not just here but all over the world.

I am deeply troubled. How do I pray for leaders who lack compassion, who only care about themselves? And for the politicians who are more concerned about getting re-elected than doing the right thing? And for the elite who are getting richer while the income gap widens? And leaders who intentionally denigrate persons of color?

My anguish runs deep. Is there any basis for hope? I keep telling myself that we are all God's people and yet how do I reconcile the tragic disparities with a God who I grew up believing loves all of us. Could the virus be some kind of punishment for our collective failure to listen and do the right things? If this is punishment, when O Lord will it end?

How do I hear the voice of God amid all of this? Will God allow us to try for a new start? How do we rediscover God's redeeming love and forgiveness? How do I have faith enough to believe that God is still God? And that God is suffering because of our pain and our refusal to listen in the first place?

God brings a new birth of love through the manger in Bethlehem. And through the resurrection, God enables new life and hope. It is up to us, individually and collectively to press on toward a new beginning.

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Hal Garman

# Rose & Joe

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*When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you.*  
Isaiah 43:2 TLB

My Mom (1914-1999) and Dad (1918-1974) suffered terrible losses early in life. In 1918, Mom lost her mother from complications after delivering a sixth child. Within several years, they both lost their fathers and had younger siblings given up for adoption. Dad also lost a younger brother and sister in childhood. These experiences surely steeled them for the trials ahead—the Great Depression and my dad’s front line service during World War II.

Mom and Dad never talked much about their hard times. Instead, they showed me how to live a Christian life, confident that God was guiding our way.

Dad worked long hours as a railroad repairman. Mom was in charge of our home. In their free time, they were active in church and helping others. Once, I complained about Dad helping an elderly friend rather than spending time with me. His response was: “This is my obligation.” His solution was to take me with him the next time.

Although neither of my parents graduated from high school, their children’s education—including Christian education—was of the utmost importance. Our family rarely missed Sunday school or church. We always said grace before dinner. When Dad was present, he would request: “God make these children good Christian citizens.” Mom’s well-worn bible was full of marked verses and notes on favorite hymns that she lived by.

Rose and Joe had hard lives and were never materially rich. Yet, they shared the spiritual wealth that God provided them. They were enablers of God’s kin-dom on earth.

**Prayer:**

*O Lord, thank you for Mom and Dad. Although I miss them deeply, they still inspire me and light my path. Amen.*

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**Joe Steller**

# Thanks Mom

This year, I lament my mother's death. Though she died in 2017, I still long to pick up the phone and speak with her. What parenting advice would she give? How would she—lover of people and hostess extraordinaire—survive COVID's isolation? What new recipes would she share? And how many loaves of her sourdough bread would I have made by now with her encouragement?

She looks at me from the pages of our photos books—at Disney World with her grandchildren, at our favorite Blue Ridge mountain sunset spot and at feast after feast of family gatherings. I know that I'm walking the steps she walked on the journey of aging, with all its delights and challenges.

This lament is about change or impermanence. While there is joy in change, there is also sorrow. My mother's bold faith gave her confidence about the future and the changes that would come, and that included her death. I am so happy for the example she set, looking forward to what would come after life and sharing her certainty that all she left behind would be well. She is leading me through the impermanence of this life, helping me to find joy amid the lament.

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.*

Lamentations 3: 21-22 ESV

## Prayer:

*Dear God of all, thank you for showing your mercy through the examples of those who go before us. Please open our eyes to better witness your steadfast love which sees us through the changes and laments of life.*

Camilla Taft Hicks

# A Time to Weep

*Jesus wept.*  
John 11:35

For those familiar with the story of Lazarus, the question may arise: Why weep knowing full well what is to come? Perhaps in this instance, tears were more about deeply connecting with a community in mourning, unaware of the pending miracle.

Fast-forward 2000 years. 2020 will be infamous for “the pandemic,” while some among us also live with the chronic pandemic, racism. Sadly, the stats are numbing. We all mourn over the zoom funerals and the viral videos of modern-day lynching. In the midst of such grief, anger, and injustice however, I am grateful we are not alone. God is with us, fully connected with His body of believers as in John 11.

Hopefully after 2000 years, we know a bit more about the character, power, and promises of Our Lord Jesus than those of John 11. So how does the insight affect our laments regarding the many pains, sufferings, and injustices of our times and lives? How do we lament the cruel reality of Good Friday while secure in the knowledge that Sunday is coming? Perhaps the answer lies in where we choose to go with our laments and why.

In these days of lamentation, may we also take time to reflect on the Answer—the unwavering Light at the end of our often deep and winding laments. I know He is faithful to deliver far beyond the sharing of grief and sorrow—providing hope, healing, justice, and new life for those who believe and place their trust in Him.

## Prayer:

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—  
Great is Thy faithfulness,” Lord, unto me!*

Chris Hong



# To Believe Without Seeing

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A few days before Christmas, I looked out my patio door and was startled then horrified to see a little goldfinch, in drab winter plumage, dangling head down, motionless, from the base of my bird feeder.

Anxious thoughts rushed through me—a foot caught? Injured? Sick? Playing possum? Not a flicker occurred when I rapped on the glass. If I opened the door, the bird might hurt itself more if its leg was trapped. Not knowing what to do was awful. My mind was full of bad images. Having to go out and touch the bird, squeamish me? What if it came to life in my hand, or, worse, didn't? Find a rehabber to take it to? Where?

I was praying for both the bird and for guidance. Four or five minutes passed, anxiety and distress ramping up and up. The poor bird just dangled. Then, with no moment of transition whatever, the goldfinch shot off into the woods faster than I've ever seen one fly!

I went from distress to total joy in a nano-second, into a wild sort of happy dance and shrieks of "Hooray" and "Thank You." Such a relief it was! I knew then I'd use that image of the bird in full flight to safety to help deal with future anxiety and that has proved true.

Jesus' words to Thomas "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed," have added meaning now. To be able to put even a bit of trust into hopeful possibilities while still in a state of fear and uncertainty is a blessing indeed. Thanks be to God for the bird's flying and for my walking into the room in time to have this experience.

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**Patricia Wood**

# Death of My Ego

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*In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion.*

Psalm 71:1 KJV

It was time to make my closing argument with God. Nothing in law school prepared me for something like this. Yet, as I stared at the soft glow of city lights through my hospital window, I knew it was now or never.

“God, you’re in control. My suffering is absolute. Will this anguish end? Is it your will to take my life now? If not, where is my healing?”

My will to live was broken, overwhelmed by my pain. In my suffering, I longed for an end to it. Was this God’s plan for me?

My doctor said the infection was stubbornly persistent. “Two weeks to live,” his final words.

Somehow that night, I turned away from self-pity, an indulgence at best. My closing argument was to be a lament, pleading for God’s grace.

I woke with a clear direction and ordered my medications discontinued, medications overwhelming my immune system and shutting down my organs.

Was it a miracle when I left the hospital a week later? I look back now realizing the miracle was in the process of lament. It helped me enlighten my ego about who was really in control when arm wrestling God

The grace and mercy of a divine presence had always been within me, allowing me to hear what Christ said about the way to eternal peace is to be born again. My lament that night wasn’t a complaint. It allowed God’s spirit to manifest itself in me. The miracle was my awakening to expressing my lamentation which then offered a path away from ego to the God within each of us.

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**Karl Marshall**

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<sup>1</sup>Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” Matthew 26:38

<sup>2</sup>Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” John 3:3

# Confession

Companion Spiritual Discipline for:

***Expressing Confidence in God: Concluding the lament in gratitude, hope, praise***

The idea of confession as a discipline may conjure images of fiery preachers grimly proclaiming, “Confess, repent, or go straight to...well, you know where.” Perhaps that’s why many of us reserve prayers of confession for only the most egregious of errors.

Confession doesn’t have to be about guilt, shame, or self-loathing. In fact, confession, when regularly practiced, becomes an expression of our confidence in God’s promise to neither leave nor forsake us. It is an invitation from a loving God to trust that the divine’s love is big enough to hold us even in all our brokenness. It helps us let go of the feelings with which we hide our sin and that drive us farther from God and others. It allows us to re-enter those relationships with the knowledge that we are enough.

Confession is, indeed, a pure gift of grace in which we can rest and take hope, knowing that before us is an opportunity to grow, change, and be transformed more fully into who God has created us to be--warts and all.

Lent is the perfect time to practice the gift of confession. This week’s devotionals explore the spaces between lament and praise. They invite us to find ways to express our hope in God’s presence in all life’s moments, just like the invitation of confession.

We encourage you this week to pause at the end of each day and prayerfully reflect on the things in it which were broken, the mistakes you made, the harm you may have caused. And then through prayer, name that before God, trusting that through God’s love you are already forgiven. In God’s loving embrace there is strength to rise the next day and do a little better.

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**Rev. William E. Green**

*Associate Pastor and*

*Director of Discipleship / Foundry UMC*

# Words of Comfort and Joy

*"For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life ,nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come ---shall separate me from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Romans 8:38-39

Dear God, Parent, Healer, Protector, Giver of Life, Friend, I give you thanks and I praise your name for this new day and all it will bring.

Yes, Lord, it is me, Fay. I come asking for mercies and questioning outcomes. It is what I do best, where else can I go to feel comforted although the answers are not always immediate. Today, Lord another child died from gun violence or some illness we think only adults should have; someone's parent or friend died unexpectedly, a young person is showing signs of dementia, a marriage has broken, dreams are destroyed, one loses a job and the threat of losing a house is frightening.

We are waiting on you, we want answers. Lord, God, hear us we pray.

Do not leave us or forsake us, we perish without you in our midst.

Dear God, we have always known there would be mountains to climb and we are depending on you for guidance on the journey.

## Prayer:

*Lord I pray that you give us the words to lift each other up. Show us how we may use our words, hands and feet to provide aid for all your people and show us when we need to be still and move out of the way so that 'Your Will' may be done.' Through Jesus the Christ I pray,  
Amen, Amen, Amen.*

Fay Allen

# The Mason

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On that sunny late autumn day, during my walking lamentation practice, I finally let myself name my pain. Fighting back tears, I prayed, “God. I don’t know what to do for my beloved.” It became a refrain as with each step my heart raced faster even as my pace slowed. Still simpering and silently repeating, “Help me, guide me God,” my mind quieted.

In the stillness came the memory of my late father, who I adored. He was called a bricklayer, but masonry was his craft. Watching him work was magical—artistry in action that both enthralled and comforted me. He would gracefully trowel a line of cement along a plumbed brick course. Then he would set the brick, tapping until it was perfectly level, before finishing with an elegant cement joint. What he built would be beautiful and would stand strong, unflinching.

God is that way too, I thought, the cold sense of fear and distress beginning to thaw. Confidence in God surfaced; I was being heard! “Your love, God, has never failed me and never will.”

Just then, I encountered a stone mason troweling cement onto the new retaining wall in a neighbor’s yard. I stopped short, shaken at his coincidental appearance and catching the mason off guard. I tried, clumsily, to compose myself and convey my admiration of his work. But, we did not speak or understand each other’s languages. Gestures ensued. He opened his arms over the wall and made a hugging motion. His wall would embrace what it was intended to support—vigilantly, reliably, constantly.

God put me in the mason’s path, as if he were a messenger, relaying the guidance I needed to hear: Be there, with arms open, in steadfast love.

Thanks be to God.

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Joanne Steller

# Lessons From Leah

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*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV

The woman in the Bible I most identify with is Leah, the wife of Jacob. She spent much of her married life lamenting that she was unloved and unwanted. Leah was merely a source of sons for her husband, who unabashedly preferred beautiful Rachel and the two sons she was able to produce. When Leah realized how fertile she was, compared to her sister who was barren for years, she thought she could win Jacob's love by giving him what Rachel could not, but this proved futile.

God saw Leah's distress, and was always keenly aware of her pain and humiliation. He vindicated her in ways she could not immediately see. Descendants of her son Levi included Moses, Aaron, and all the priests and Levites in the Jewish nation. Her son Judah became the ancestor of kings, including David and Solomon. It is the Tribe of Judah and the line of David through which Jesus Christ came into this world.

Leah was in God's embrace, whether she fully realized it or not. She was the mother of six sons and one daughter. The names of Reuben, Simeon and Levi reflected her hope that Jacob would begin to love her. But when Judah, her fourth, was born, she chose instead to praise God in spite of her dashed hopes and humiliation. This was Leah's turning point—at which she began to see herself as God saw her. Our sense of our inferiority pales when our joy and happiness are rooted in things eternal.

We too may never fully understand the “why” of our pain and disappointments, but must hold onto our faith that God loves us beyond measure and uses us for His glory in ways we often may not see in this life.

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**Ruth Brown**

# A Man of Sorrows Acquainted with Grief

Once upon a time, there was a young man who longed to be someone different. He wanted to be more comfortable around people—to be a wiser person and, most of all, he didn't want to be gay.

He cried out to God through many hopeless years: Why did you make me this way? Why did you allow this to happen when I truly want to be a good person?

As time and life moved forward, he came to a reluctant acceptance that, though being gay was part of who he was, living a full life in communion with God would only be possible if he kept that part of himself hidden. Of course, that wasn't really a full life, since it came with the fear that others would find out.

Then, over a period of years, a change began to come. It happened in steps over time by meeting and talking to other gay and gay-accepting people. He became part of a welcoming church where LGBTQ people are not just tolerated but fully integrated into the life of the church as lay leaders, greeters, teachers, and eventually as pastors. His church involvement, plus meeting a loving partner, led to a fuller acceptance of himself as a creation of God.

Thanks to societal advances in LGBTQ visibility and equal rights, fewer people struggle with their orientation. But many still do, due to cultural narrowness and misguided interpretations of Christianity. The vision and leadership of Foundry continues to be important in this area, especially as we find new ways to reach beyond the DC area.

**Prayer:**

*Let us continue to proclaim the truth of God's love for all. May all those facing despair over their God-given nature find hope for the future and a diverse and loving community where they can thrive.*

Paul Keefer

FRIDAY, MARCH 26

# COVID-19

## Body Shutdown

For the past ten years, I have struggled with gaining and losing weight. This roller coaster ride has not been healthy. Then the Covid-19 pandemic struck in March in the middle of my job hunt. Bam! Gyms closed and in-person networking was impossible. Feeling trapped, I began to overeat and rarely did any exercise.

I started to shut down physically. Why God? Why did you bring this terrible pandemic, when you knew I was already struggling to get consistent exercise and find meaningful work?

I got comfortable not exercising and snacking on unhealthy foods. Sure, there were rare moments when my partner and I would take walks. However, I started to view the COVID shutdown as a fair excuse to continue shutting down my body.

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In the fall, I shared my laments of struggling to find work during the pandemic with a spiritual mentor. She suggested “Wil, why don’t you go swimming? I know you love swimming. Isn’t your gym open?”

Slowly my eyes opened to my displacement. This was more than just gaining weight—I was adrift mentally and spiritually. A new inner voice spoke to me: Be gentle with these activities AND DO IT! You were made to enjoy movement and outreach. I started hiking with close friends and enjoying nature. I also re-connected with former work colleagues via Zoom. It has been slow, but my body and mind are re-engaging with this new reality.

What a blessing this weight gain has been to motivate me to stay active gently and re-engage my body and mind to the new circumstances of this pandemic.

### Prayer:

*Thank you, God for the voices of encouragement to stay active mentally, physically and spiritually.*

Wil Rumble



**SATURDAY, MARCH 27**

# My Mantra

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*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Philippians 2:3-4 NIV



After darkness fell in 2020, each of us had adequate time to stand face to face with self. This unexpected life review has shown many of us that what truly matters is how well we treat others.

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**Ta-Chen Wu**

# And, I Wait

Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem amid the crowds shouting, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Jesus knew crucifixion awaited.

Year after year after year, I imagine myself in that crowd of folk more than 2,000 years ago joining in the festivities shouting, waving palms and giving thanks to God. Over the past year in particular and many years in general, I have joined countless crowds praying, shouting and crying for justice. And, I wait...

As I am quick to pour out my praise to God, I come now with a fresh urgency to lay out my lament before omnipotent God. I grieve. I hurt. I weep. And, I wait...

Lamentation is exhausting and emptying, agonizing and afflicting. A space all too familiar for many of my siblings and I who are blessed and burdened with brown and black hues. We remain on full display for the whole world to witness the unjust systems perpetrated against us. All the world bears witnesses to our pain. I am a voice joining a multi-racial crowd across this land shouting, waving signs, “Black Lives Matter,” “No Justice No Peace.” A resounding refrain, “prepare the way of justice for all.” Can you imagine yourself in that crowd?

Wounds weaken. Pain pierces. Blood pours out saturating deep into the abyss. Jesus’ crucifixion. Black and Brown bodies know too.

I long for systemic justice. My soul weeps. I lament in God’s embrace. And, I wait.

## Prayer:

*Grant us O God, the triumphal entry of your justice and peace for all of God’s beloved. Amen.*

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**Dawn M. Hand**

*Pittsburgh District Superintendent  
Western PA Conference + United Methodist Church*

# The Power and Equality of Lament

In 1961, James Baldwin stated, “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost, almost all of the time.” It is 2021 and his words still ring true. Baldwin’s observation was based on both individual and communal suffering, often amidst “extraordinary and criminal indifference.”

I resonate with Baldwin’s observation. And yet, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, I know that prolonged rage is not healthy for the mind, body or spirit. Conversely, repression is equally unhealthy and actually compounds the harm. So, where do the faithful turn for an outlet to such trauma and systemic oppression?

The Psalter offers a response through psalms of lament. The ability to lament, to cry out to God, is a gift. It is a release of pain, anguish, anger, deep disappointment and sorrow. It is an exquisitely powerful witness, and an appropriate locus for righteous indignation. Rather than entrust our deepest suffering to one who cannot intervene or bring justice, the one who laments believes that God cares, is attentive and will wield justice. This is so important today. In a society that often centers whiteness and seeks to control the agency of Black and Brown bodies, this biblical model exemplifies God’s impartiality. God is summoned by the lament, and this reminds both the one praying and society at large that God does not privilege one over another—God’s very presence and love demonstrate equality.

We cannot lose this form of prayer. Walter Brueggemann argues that to lose it reinforces the status quo, reduces God to a deity only concerned with praise and leads to “grim obedience and eventually despair.” It is through lament that the whole community finds redress, healing, hope and a future filled with justice.

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**Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling**  
*Presiding Bishop*  
*Baltimore-Washington Conference*  
*of the United Methodist Church*

# The Carpenter

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And I have tried, I've really tried to reconstruct my heart,  
But I am lost and like a scavenger looking for the missing parts,  
Gentle honesty, unbound charity, and love, sometimes, look nothing like me.

And I wonder can you hear my heart, Lord, in its seclusion, hear it cry and  
skip a beat, Can there be any security in hiding the failures inside of me?  
All the wrongs I could never make right, there's no rewind to this life,  
It feels like a stroke I can't command, like a fortress built on sand.

And yet I hear, life will always give me a nail and a hammer and a carpenter  
who can repair,  
Nothing more (why does it always come to this?)  
You want me to be, you want me to be a true believer.

Well can't you see I'm trying, trying to nail down my faith,  
With the hammer of discipline, I've received your grace,  
But I feel so unworthy now and I ask you to intervene,  
To open my heart, to be unafraid, to let others depend on me.

And I will praise, I will praise, I will praise you until my heart is full,  
And sing that I am saved by holy righteousness,  
And be assured that in your name my heart will be understood.

Cause life will always give me a nail and hammer and a carpenter  
who can repair,  
Nothing more (why does it always come to this?)  
Gentle honesty, unbound charity, and a love one day that looks like me.

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Audrey MillerHallett

# Eat Pray Love

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*For nothing will be impossible with God.*  
Luke 1:37 NRV

During the incredible saga of 2020, my life became less familiar. The isolation became unbearable. My mind wandered to thoughts of how we got to this place.

The collision of COVID with America's failure to value Black and Brown lives and the flaws and shortcomings of national leadership was overwhelming. And it was compounded by the reality television on display in the Oval Office that diminished democracy with unfettered assaults on election results.

Amid the chaos and confusion, I searched for answers. When did conspiracy theories become truth? Whose voice will cry out in the wilderness for decency, truth and moral character? Where do friend and neighbor meet in recognition that we are all children of God?

I concluded that life is one big conundrum of knowledge gained, mistakes made, questions asked, dreams realized or deferred, relationships forged, traumas endured and lessons learned. Tension exists in everything we do, pulling or pushing us in different directions, sometimes divine—sometimes not.

The challenges of 2020 amounted to a phenomenal reset. They reminded me of the book *Eat Pray Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert in which a young woman travels the world in search of love and direction following her divorce. We similarly confront ourselves each day questioning who we are, our connection to God, and our responsibilities to self and other. Underneath it all, our souls are searching for God, the Light of understanding, the Peace that exceeds our understanding.

**Prayer:**

*Reawaken me, Lord, to your presence and your power...to return sight to the politically blind; to restore spiritual and nutritional food to every table; to build community where everyone is cherished. Teach us how to pray and love in every circumstance. Amen.*

# Here I Am

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The challenges that unfolded in 2020 deepened my understanding of the raw suffering that so many experience in this nation and around the world. There were victims of a pandemic, joblessness, hunger, and inequities of all kinds.

Where are you, God? Our world is hurting! God, we need you now!

I have an affinity for quiet and reflection. These spiritual tools have helped me cope with the crises of my life, ranging from a relocation to this country with three young children a little over forty years ago to navigating the American educational system, wrestling with feelings of inadequacy to the deep loss of my husband in 2015.

But in her sermon on December 20, Pastor Ginger asked “what are you doing now for justice?” Noting the multiple pandemics ravaging our nations, she said the question of how long this will continue “is, in part, ours to answer.”

These words continue to haunt me.

I came to the realization that my extensive time engrossed in journaling and reflection, while very helpful to me, also insulated me from the real world. The spiritual practice of lament draws me to the multifaceted nature of suffering, not only within me, but also around me.

In her sermon, Pastor Ginger reminded me that Mary and Elizabeth responded to God’s call and I also have a role to play in “bending the moral arc toward justice.” Lord, here I am.

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**Josiane Blackman**

# Lamenting the Arc

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*I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit.*  
Lamentations 3:55 ESV

Black folx in the US have never ceased lamenting. There have been moments of reprieve, a victory or a step forward, times when the arc of the moral universe bent more assuredly toward justice—when we knew that God was shaping and guiding the work of mortals here on earth. But not so much in recent times.

We cry out to be heard, valued, treated with dignity and equity.  
We cry out, but we're weary, tired, spent. O Lord! Help us! Hear our lament!

We need White Christians to show up, to step up, to commit to defeating racism—to start by examining their own hearts and considering how they, perhaps unintentionally, support racism in their everyday decisions and actions.

And I—along with other Black folx and people of color—need to find the inner resources, the resilience, the faith to keep on, keepin' on—to continue pushing forward, to not give up, to rout out the racist beliefs that I have unwittingly imbibed, to both forgive and demand of myself and my siblings of all races.

I have to remind myself constantly that Jesus, a revolutionary, did not give up—that he persevered and sacrificed himself to create a world of justice and peace and hope and love. Jesus did not give up.

Lord, we pray for you to fill our hearts and minds. Guide us to work together, with passion and diligence, to upend racism and to disrupt the unjust status quo. Even as we lament, help us to not give up, to not bow out, to not shut down or shrink, and instead to follow your son and create the Kin-dom to which you have called us.

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**Kumea Shorter-Gooden**

*Member / John Wesley AME Zion Church*

# Is There No Balm in Gilead?

*“The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved. For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?”*

Jeremiah 8:20-22, NRSV

**Is there no balm in Gilead? Black slaves of the American South struggled with that question.** They were condemned by their slave masters and told their life of oppression was God’s will. They were victims of “sin-sick souls,” held captive and oppressed, laboring under the lash of the slave master. But they were a people of resilience that found hope in the face of hopelessness; courage in the face of despair. **They heard Jeremiah’s lament and answered with a song: “There IS a balm in Gilead!”**

**That balm is “transforming grace!”** Howard Thurman made the point in his classic *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death*. Thurman tells of Jeremiah’s having “come to a ‘Dead Sea’ place in his life.” And of the question the prophet cries out in lament, Thurman writes:

Jeremiah is saying actually, “There **must** be a balm in Gilead; it cannot be that there is no balm in Gilead.” The relentless winnowing of his own bitter experience has laid bare his soul to the end that he is brought face to face with the very ground and core of his own faith.

The slave caught the mood of this spiritual dilemma, and with it did an amazing thing. **He straightened the question mark in Jeremiah’s sentence into an exclamation point: “There is a balm in Gilead!”**

Do you see? Only God’s grace could do that. Have you ever hit a “Dead Sea” place in your life? Have you ever had a dark night of the soul? Have you ever had more questions than answers? Has your faith ever faltered? **Well, our ancestors want you to know “there IS a balm in Gilead!”**

**Rev. Dr. Ianther Marie Mills**

*Senior Pastor / Asbury United Methodist Church*



# A Reason to Hope

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*My eyes are blind with tears, my stomach in a knot. My insides have turned to jelly over my people's fate. Babies and children are fainting all over the place.*

Lamentations 2:11 MSG

Fretting over the soul of our nation in recent times, I found solace in the book of Lamentations. When the brokenness of humanity is on full display, lament is an appropriate response.

Lamentations invites us to hear the voice of sorrow as we live between the effects of our sin and God's future restoration. The times in which we live are not only *trying* times, but they are also *crying* times.

We cannot be unmoved by the chorus of cries that reverberate through the streets of cities across our nation.

Many are crying out at the failure of many of our spiritual and political leaders who gave cover and comfort to an administration that has laid ruin to truth, toppled innumerable norms, and sent snaking fissures spreading across the foundation of the world's oldest democracy.

We are haunted by the echoes of myriad cries for the loss of life due to pandemic, rising unemployment, and inadequate health care.

And yet undergirding all of these cries is the cry for racial justice.

Here is Good News. Even as this cry grows louder, in the midst of the problems we face as nation, we still have the power of God's promises. God reminds Jeremiah of a promise in Lamentations 5:17 and 19 *"We are sick at our very hearts and we can hardly see through our tears but You, O Lord, are King forever...And You will rule to the end of time."*

He reminds us that in spite of the tragedies, God is in control. God is still on the throne. The steadfast love of God never ends. There is a reason to hope.

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**Rev. Junius B. Dotson**

*General Secretary/CEO*

*Discipleship Ministries | The United Methodist Church*

# Learning to Lament

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## During Lent

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Explore the sometimes uncomfortable, often counter-intuitive, work of confronting our grief, sorrow, and anger while remaining rooted in the promise that God goes with us on the journey.

### **Leaning Into Lament Online Retreat**

*February 20, 2021, 10 a.m. to Noon on Zoom\**

Join Joanne Steller and Pastor Will Green to explore the connections between Lent, lament, and how the gifts of lament can help us. For details, email [discipleship@foundrymc.org](mailto:discipleship@foundrymc.org).

### **Lenten Lectures on Lament**

*Sundays, 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Zoom\**

- **February 21:** *An Introduction to Lamentation* with Pastor Will Green and Dr. M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, author of “Suffering in God’s Presence: The Role of Lament in Transformation.”
- **February 28:** *The Role of Lament in Building Beloved Community* with Dr. Asa J. Lee, Dean of Student Life at Wesley Theological Seminary
- **March 7:** *The Role of Lament in LGBTQ Advocacy* with Bishop Karen Oliveto, Resident Bishop of the Mountain Sky Annual Conference
- **March 14th:** *The Role of Lament in the Work of Racial Justice* with Dr. Izetta Autumn Mobley, member of the Journey to Racial Justice Steering Committee
- **March 21st:** *Lament and Sacred Music* with Stanley Thurston, Director of Music Ministries
- **March 28th: Lament and the Psalms** with Dr. Denise Dombkowski Hopkins, Woodrow W. & Mildred B. Miller Professor Biblical Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary.

### **Practicing Spirituality: Spiritual Disciplines for Lamenting**

*Sundays, February 14—March 28, 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Zoom\**

Join a Lenten adult education series exploring devotional themes and the spiritual disciplines that enrich each week’s reflections on lamentation. For details, email [discipleship@foundrymc.org](mailto:discipleship@foundrymc.org)

### **Lenten Praise and Prayer**

*Wednesdays, February 24—March 31, at 6 p.m. on Zoom\**

Join us weekly for these brief services using spiritual disciplines featured in our Lenten Devotional.

\*For Zoom links and details go to: <http://bit.ly/FoundryLent2021>

## Gratitude

The Lenten Devotional is one of Foundry's volunteer Discipleship Ministries under the direction of Pastor William E. Green. Since 2015, the Practicing Spirituality adult education class has hosted the devotional's creative development

## 2021 Lenten Devotional Ministry Team

**Leaders:** Rev. William E. Green, Joanne Steller

**Workshop and Editorial Support:** Meg Lavery, Stephen Roberts, Steven Sloan and Jeanette Barker

## Cover art

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## Our Connection Contributors

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## Dr. M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall

***Professor of Psychology at Rosemead School of Psychology,  
Biola University***

Dr. Hall's 2016 article in the *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care*, "Suffering in God's Presence: The Role of Lament in Transformation," and its companion video were primary resources for the study and workshops that inspired this devotional and its contents.

## Released

*Hear me living God  
Please grant me heaven's embrace  
Relieve my heart's pain.*  
Chuck Waldron

## **Lamenting in God's Embrace** **2021 Lenten Devotional**

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Foundry United Methodist Church has been in ministry  
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